

# RELEASE

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## March designated as Prescribed Fire Awareness Month

*Governor's proclamation brings attention to the benefits of controlled burning*

COLUMBIA—Gov. Nikki Haley has proclaimed March 2015 Prescribed Fire Awareness Month in South Carolina.

A coalition of state, federal and non-governmental land management organizations under the umbrella of the South Carolina Prescribed Fire Council requested the proclamation to raise awareness of the essential role that fire plays in both the stewardship of our natural resources and the protection of lives and property.

Prescribed, or controlled, burning is the skilled application of fire under planned weather and fuel conditions to achieve specific forest and land management objectives. Controlled burning is an ancient practice, notably used by Native Americans for crop management, insect and pest control, and hunting habitat improvement, among other purposes.

The practice continues today under the direction of land managers who understand the appropriate weather conditions, fuel loads and atmospheric conditions for conducting such burns. These carefully applied fires are an important tool to reduce wildfires, maintain wildlife habitat, and keep the more than 13 million acres of forested land in South Carolina healthy and productive.

While prescribed burning cannot stop all wildfires, it is the best management tool available for preventing larger and more frequent outbreaks. "Prescribed burning is not only the most effective, economical protection against wildfires because it reduces accumulated fuels," said Haley in her proclamation, "but it is also a key tool in managing and maintaining the ecological integrity of South Carolina's woodlands, grasslands, agricultural areas and wildlife habitats."

Darryl Jones, SCFC Fire Chief and Forest Protection Director, said about 500,000 acres are prescribed burned every year in South Carolina, but at least one million acres should be burned annually. "The benefits of prescribed burning are many and varied," said Jones. "Not only does it reduce the severity of wildfires, but it also improves wildlife habitat, increases recreation opportunities and protects the aesthetic value of our forestlands."

"Many landowners are reluctant to apply prescribed fire to their woodlands and natural areas because they lack the skills and knowledge needed to do it safely and effectively," said T.J. Savereno, Clemson Extension associate and chair of the South Carolina Prescribed Fire Council. "Much of this land accounts for the additional acreage that should properly be managed with fire. The Council is dedicated to promoting the responsible use of prescribed fire and assisting landowners and forestry professionals. We greatly appreciate Gov. Haley's help with achieving these objectives by issuing this proclamation."

### **MEDIA: WANT TO SEE A PRESCRIBED BURN IN ACTION?**

Several South Carolina agencies conduct prescribed burns regularly across the state and welcome media coverage as weather conditions permit. Please see the contact information above to make arrangements for visiting and taping a prescribed burn near you.